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## Teaching Tip #1

### Planning Lessons

Information to be included in a lesson plan can be considered under the following headings: Aims, Procedure/Stages, Activities and Timing, Interaction Patterns, Anticipated Problems/Solutions. (See LESSON PLANNING TEMPLATE)

#### 1. Lesson Aims

Aims of a lesson are what we want learners to learn or be able to do at the end of a lesson. Aims may focus, for example, on a **function**, or a **grammatical structure**, on the **vocabulary** of a particular topic or on developing a language **skill**. Aims, especially for younger learners, may not always focus on particular areas of language. The aim of a lesson may also be listening to a story for pleasure or encouraging a positive attitude towards the foreign language.

Questions you need to ask (and answer) are not only *What do I, the teacher, aim to do?* but also *What do I expect the students to do and/ or to have achieved by the end of the lesson? What do my students already know? What specific language will they understand and use? or What specific skills will they have developed?*

It is important to distinguish between **teaching aims** and intended learner outcomes (**objectives**). A teaching aim might be *To present and give controlled practice of ...* whereas an intended learning objective might be *By the end of the lesson the students should be able to ...* When stating objectives try to avoid 'vague' verbs such as *understand, appreciate, learn*. Action verbs such as *identify, present, ask, talk, describe, explain, demonstrate, contrast* are clearer and easier to design a lesson around.

Example: Teaching aims:

- To present and practise *Why don't you?* for giving advice
- To give students practice in reading both for gist and for detail
- To develop oral fluency when narrating past events
- To enable students to talk about what people have 'done wrong' in the past, using the '*should (not) have + past participle*' construction.

Objectives:

- By the end of the lesson the learners will have talked about and compared past experiences.

- By the end of the lesson the learners will be able to express future plans and arrangements.
- By the end of the lesson, the learners will be able to differentiate between the present perfect simple and continuous.

It is also important to differentiate aims from activities: e.g. *the activity – to do a role play, the aim – to practice making a complaint.*

### The main aim and subsidiary aims

Often in a lesson you will have a main aim and a number of subsidiary aims. This is particularly true, for example, in a lesson in which skills are integrated or when a listening or reading text is used to introduce a language item. It is important that you recognize the main aim of the lesson and of each stage.

A main aim describes the most important thing we want to achieve in a lesson. For example, we may want learners to understand and practise using new language; to reinforce or consolidate (i.e. to make stronger) the use of language they already know by giving them further practice; or to revise language they have recently learnt. Subsidiary aims show the language or skills learners must be able to use well in order to achieve the main aim of the lesson.

#### Example:

Main aim: to practice making polite requests in the context of making holiday arrangements.

Subsidiary aims:

Grammar: to revise modal auxiliary verbs.

Functional exponents: *Could/Would you ...?*

Vocabulary: to consolidate lexis for travel, accommodation.

Phonology: to focus on intonation.

Speaking: to give controlled oral practice.

### Personal aims

For any particular lesson, in addition to the learning aims for your students, you may also wish to set yourself a 'personal aim'. This aim focuses on an aspect of your teaching which you would like to improve. For example, *to talk less myself and involve the students more, or to make my instructions clearer, to try different correction techniques, to get learners to work with different partners* etc. If you are being observed, you could ask the observer to give you feedback on how well you achieved your personal aim.

## **2. Procedure / Stages**

This is the part of the lesson plan which lays out the steps – the stages – in the lesson to ensure that the aim(s) is (are) achieved.

You should indicate on your plan what will be done at each stage and why (the stage aim), the approximate time and perhaps details of any complex instructions you are going to give or questions you plan to ask.

In order to do this you have to consider how you will order the stages and the approach(es), activities, and materials you will use at each stage. You will have to answer these questions:

*How much time do I have? / Approximately how will I divide up the lesson into stages?*

*How much time will each stage take?*

You also need to ask yourself:

*What will be the aim of each stage? How will the stages be linked?*

There are many different approaches to teaching English. However, most of these plans tend to follow this standard lesson plan format.

1. Warm-up
2. Presentation
3. Controlled practice
4. Free practice
5. Feedback

### Warm up

Students might arrive late, tired, stressed or otherwise distracted to class. In order to get their attention, it's best to open with a warm-up activity. The warm-up can be as simple as telling a short story or asking students questions. The warm-up can also be a more thought-out activity such as playing a song in the background, or drawing an elaborate picture on the board. While it's fine to start a lesson with a simple "How are you?", it's much better to tie your warm-up into the theme of the lesson.

### Presentation

The presentation can take a variety of forms:

- Reading selection
- Soliciting students' knowledge about a specific point
- Teacher centered explanation
- Listening selection
- Short video
- Student presentation

The presentation should include the main "meat" of the lesson. For example: If you are working on phrasal verbs, make the presentation by providing a short reading extract peppered with phrasal verbs.

### Controlled practice

The controlled practice section of the lesson provides students direct feedback on their comprehension of the task at hand. Generally, controlled practice involves some type of exercise. Remember that an exercise doesn't necessarily mean dry, rote exercises,

although these can be used as well. Controlled practice should help the student focus on the main task and provide them with feedback - either by the teacher or other students.

### Free practice

Free practice integrates the focus structure / vocabulary / functional language into students' overall language use. Free practice exercises often encourage students to use the target language structures in:

- Small group discussions
- Written work (paragraphs and essays)
- Longer listening comprehension practice
- Games

The most important aspect of free practice is that students should be encouraged to integrate language learned into larger structures. This requires more of a "stand-off" approach to teaching. It's often useful to circulate around the room and take notes on common mistakes. In other words, students should be allowed to make more mistakes during this part of the lesson.

### Feedback

Feedback allows students to check their understanding of the lesson's topic. Feedback can be done quickly at the end of class by asking students questions about the target structures. Another approach is to have students discuss the target structures in small groups, once again giving students the chance to improve their understanding on their own.

## **3. Activities and Interaction Patterns**

For each stage you will have to think what approach you are going to use and what activities the students will do to achieve your aims. There is a variety of types of activities: brainstorming, matching, gap-filling, listening for main ideas, listening for detail, reading for gist, writing, speaking, ranking, group decision-making, checking answers, a role-play, etc.

To describe the interaction patterns taking place during the lesson it is useful to use the following 'code': T = teacher; S = an individual student; T→C = the teacher working with the whole class; S,S,S = students working on their own; S↔S = students working in pairs; GG = students working in groups.

## **4. Anticipated Problems**

It is a good idea to make a note on your plan of any anticipated problems – in terms of language or classroom management – that could occur during any of the activities and any strategies you have considered for dealing with these problems.

You can anticipate what students will find difficult in a particular language item by thoroughly researching the language you are planning to teach. Investigate, if possible, the ways in which their language is different from English. For example, will your

students have difficulty with the sound /ə/ because it doesn't exist in their language? You can also anticipate difficulties by finding out as much as you can about what the students have done in previous classes – their individual strengths and weaknesses in skills work, for example.

There are a number of ways in which the timing and organization of your lesson can be affected. For example, it is a good idea to think about what you would do if:

- the students take a longer or shorter time to do the activities than you had planned
- they find an activity easier or more difficult than you thought they would;
- some students finish before the others
- there are some students who need extra support;
- there are uneven numbers for a pairwork activity;
- some or all of the students have already met the material you have based your lesson round, for example, they have already seen the video you were going to show.

### **Basic Principles of Lesson Planning**

Coherence – there should be a logical pattern to the lesson. The activities should be connected to each other.

Variety - include a number of different activities, allow students to do different things.

Flexibility - react to the students' needs. **Teach the PEOPLE in the class rather than your plan!**

### **Ways of Varying a Lesson**

#### **Tempo**

Activities may be brisk and fast-moving (such as guessing games) or slow and reflective (such as reading literature and responding in writing).

#### **Organization**

The learners may work on their own at individualized tasks; or in pairs or groups; or as a full class in interaction with the teacher.

#### **Mode and skill**

Activities may be based on the written or the spoken language; and within these, they may vary as to whether the learners are asked to produce (speak, write) or receive (listen, read).

#### **Difficulty**

Activities may be seen as easy and non-demanding or difficult, requiring concentration and effort.

**Topic**

Both the language teaching point and the (nonlinguistic) topic may change from one activity to another.

**Mood**

Activities vary also in mood: light and fun-based versus serious and profound; happy versus sad; tense versus relaxed.

**Stir-settle** Some activities enliven and excite learners (such as controversial discussions, or activities that involve physical movement); others, like dictations, have the effect of calming them down.

**Active-passive** Learners may be activated in a way that encourages their own initiative; or they may only be required to do as they are told.